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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE CHILD AND THE CHILD-LIKE IN DANIIL KHARMS' CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND LITERATURE FOR ADULTS

BY

LARISSA JEAN KLEIN-TUMANOV

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN

RUSSIAN LITERATURE

DEPARTMENT OF SLAVIC AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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Н. Заболоцкий.

Прощание с друзьями

В широких шляпах, длинных пиджаках,
С тетрадями своих стихотворений,
Давным-давно рассыпались вы в прах,
Как ветки облетевшие сирени.

Вы в той стране, где нет готовых форм,
Где все разъято, смешано, разбито,
Где вместо неба — лишь могильный холм
И неподвижна лунная орбита.

Там на ином, невнятном языке
Поет синклит беззвучных насекомых,
Там с маленьким фонариком в руке
Жук-человек приветствует знакомых.

Спокойно ль вам, товарищи мои?
Легко ли вам? и все ли вы забыли?
Теперь вам братья — корни, муравьи,
Травинки, вздохи, столбики из пыли.

Теперь вам сестры — цветики гвоздик,
Соски́ сирени, щепочки, цыплята...
И уж не в силах вспомнить ваш язык
Там наверху оставленного брата.

In memoriam:
D. Kharms, A. Vvedenskii

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Edward Mozejko, supervisor

Robert Busch

Elena Siemens

Date: October 10, 1990

Dedication

To my family, to my dear husband Vladimir, to his family, and to D. Kharms, who now could have been an old toothless man of just 85.

AND

To E. Mozejko, for help with this thesis, and to the cats in the basement of the Lenin Library in Moscow who made my research there a little more interesting.

Abstract

My thesis deals with the relationship between the literature for adults and the children's works of the Russian absurdist author Daniil Kharms. The first chapter is a biography of the writer, detailing his difficult and tragic life in the atmosphere of the Soviet Union under Stalin's terror. Chapter two deals with D. Kharms within the Soviet literary institution. I discuss the system of censorship and propaganda under which the author was forced to work. I demonstrate why Kharms was forced to hide his works for adults, limiting his public activities to children's literature only. Chapter three deals with questions of genre and formal games in both his literature for adults and his children's literature. Chapter four is an analysis of characters in Kharms' œuvre: the children in his children's works and the child-like adults in his literature for adults. I demonstrate the normalcy of characters in Kharms' works for children and the abnormality of his child-like adult characters. I conclude that the numerous child-like qualities of Kharms' adult characters create a special absurd and nightmarish effect. Chapter five deals with the darker side of Kharms' children's works. While his literature for children is much more positive and innocently playful than his works for adults, elements of this frightening adult world do creep into his children's universe, distinguishing Kharms' children's works from conventional children's literature. In the conclusion I argue that Kharms, the writer for adults, and Kharms, the children's author, clearly influenced each other, creating works which fit neither the conventional expectations of adult readers nor those of children.

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Chapter 1: Introduction[1]

Oscar Wilde, Eugene Ionesco, Lev Tolstoy, Isaac Bashevis Singer and even Salman Rushdie have all written for children; however, these authors are mainly known as writers for adults, and their children's works are considered secondary. In the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s there was one author, Daniil Kharms, who wanted very much to be a writer for adults, but because of the rising totalitarian control over literature, he could not possibly hold such a position, for his experimental modernist works were not acceptable to the censors and certainly were not compatible with the ideal of socialist realism adopted in the middle of Kharms' short career at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers. Although in principle and practice Kharms saw himself as chiefly a writer for adults— he privately worked on literature intended for an adult audience throughout his career as a children's author and he even hoped to publish his collected adult works in book form[2]—in his lifetime he only succeeded in publishing two of his poems for adults.[3] Publicly Kharms was a children's author, a job in the Soviet Union which traditionally attracted many writers

[1] I intend to use the past tense in referring to literary practice and literary criticism in the Soviet Union. This has to do with the new Gorbachev era, which has hopefully changed the Soviet literary institution.

[2] See V.I. Glotser, "Kharms sobiraet knigu," Russkaia Literatura 1, 1989, pp. 206-12.

[3] These were "Sluchai na zheleznoi doroge" in the collection of the Leningrad Union of Poets published in 1926 and "Stikh Petra Iashkina" in the same type of collection in 1927.

whose adult literature was rejected by the official literary system. Up to the present day it is still Kharms the children's author who is best known and loved, although finally under new historical and political conditions the writer for adults has also been allowed to make his debut.

Along with N. Zabolotskii, K. Vaginov, I. Bakhterev, A. Vvedenskii, D. Levin and Ju. Vladimirov, Daniil Ivanovich Kharms—born Iuvachev (1905-1942)— was one of the founding members of the literary section of the Leningrad avant-garde literary group which called itself "Обэриу" (Oberiu). This acronym stands for "Ob'edinenie real'nogo iskusstva" (Association of Real Art), and it is characteristic of the generally playful, child-like approach of the group's members that the final letter "u" does not apparently stand for anything. Some hold that the "u" is written at the end of "Oberiu" in accordance with the well-known nonsense children's rhyme: "потому что, потому, все кончается на «у»" ("because, because everything ends with "u"). Apart from its literary program, the group also proposed the eventual unification of other like-minded "left" artists in sections on the cinema, fine arts and music.[4]

Oberiu was founded officially in 1927 at a time when various small literary groups—which had aimed to be at the centre of

[4]Alice Stone-Nakhimovsky, Laughter in the Void: An Introduction to the Writings of Daniil Kharms and Alexander Vvedenskii (Vienna: Wiener Slavistischer Almanach, 1982), p. 17.

creating the new literature and art suitable for the young Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—were already being pressured to disband by large mass organizations of proletarian writers.[5] Oberiuty, as the members of Oberiu were called, espoused an art form which has been compared to the techniques of subsequent absurdist movements in France and elsewhere. However, unfortunately "[for the Oberiuty,] becoming members of the European movement of the Theater of the Absurd was precluded by the political situation in the Soviet Union."[6] Although Kharms and his associates were preceded by European absurdist authors, such as A. Jarry (1873-1907), it is very difficult to establish any links between examples of Western European absurdism and its Soviet counterpart. Nonetheless, Kharms' work and that of Jarry, Ionesco and Beckett all share the "grotesquely comic as well as irrational"[7] quality of the absurdist movement in its larger modernist context. In fact Ionesco's definition of the absurd can just as easily apply to Kharms: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."[8] Kharms' world is indeed purposeless and

[5]M. Slonim, Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems 1917-1977 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 108.

[6]Ibid, p. 3.

[7] M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 1.

[8]Quoted by Martin Esslin in Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1980), p. 23.

irrational: one often has the impression that characters and events are part of a mathematical game where elements are constantly arranged and rearranged in different curious and bizarre combinations with little regard for the concerns of the real world. In my opinion these qualities of Kharms' absurdism appear similar to the absurd worlds of Western European authors because of the very specific nature of the literature of the absurd. But as to the question of influence, it is most fruitful to turn to Russian literature and look for such antecedents of Kharms as Gogol and Dostoevski.[9] In fact François Jost points out that it may have been Russian literature in the first place that influenced the Western European absurdists and existentialists: "... a contemporary critic could reasonably try to defend the hypothesis that the literature of the absurd is essentially Slavic in origin with a dramatist like the Romanian Ionesco serving as an intermediary."[10]

From its very beginnings Oberiu wanted to distance and even cut itself off from previous trends in literature. The founding Oberiu manifesto proposes a new approach to art through "real," concrete, non-symbolic, non-emotional, non-literary work,[11] and

[9]As to Kharms' most immediate Russian successors, we see such playwrights as N. Erdman and N. Evreinov. cf. N. Erdman, Two Plays, (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1975) and Spencer Golub, N. Evreinov: The Theatre of Paradox and Transformation (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984). Also, see M. Esslin, p. 65.

[10]François Jost, Introduction to Comparative Literature (Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1974), p. 77.

calls for a new, understandable language and a "new feeling of life."[12] As we read in the Oberiu manifesto: "*Мы—поэты нового мироощущения и нового искусства. Мы—творцы не только нового поэтического языка, но и создатели нового ощущения жизни и ее предметов*."[13] To attain their goal of novelty and understandability in language Oberiu proposed for one the rejection of the Futurists' *zaum'* or transrational language: made-up sounds and formations which emphasize a move away from the referential function of language.[14] Although the overall influence of the Futurists on Oberiu was great, the Oberiu manifesto contains harsh words against them: "*Мы—первые враги тех, кто холостит слово и превращает его в бессильного и бессмысленного ублюдка*."[15] However, despite this criticism, as we will see in Chapter 3, Kharms turned to playing with transrational language in many of his works. The Oberiu theatrical evening at the Dom Pechati in Leningrad on January 28, 1928 called "Tri levykh chasa" (Three Left Hours) marked the official debut of this new literary group and included a performance of Kharms' play *Elizaveta Bam* which was held as the model work of the new

[11] See ibid, p. 15.

[12] Slonim, p. 107.

[13] R.R. Milner-Gulland, " 'Left Art' in Leningrad: the OBERIU Declaration," Oxford Slavonic Papers, New Series III (1970), p. 70.

[14] George Gibian, Introd. The Man in the Black Coat: Russia's Literature of the Absurd (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987), p. 18.

[15] Ibid, Milner-Gulland.

Oberiu doctrine.

Because of the very brief existence of this artistic movement, Oberiu has been called "the last flare-up of Russian modernism before it was suffocated by Stalinist socialist realism."[16] From 1927 to 1930 the Oberiuty were limited in their artistic expression to participation in literary readings and small-scale dramatic productions. Oberiu was doomed from the start as the powerful "proletarian" literary groups of the day, especially "Proletkult" and later RAPP, were calling for an official literature of social commitment: "The Proletarian factions demanded a message, lucid style, and that writers keep in mind the audience of uneducated workers and write for them."[17] Attacks by *Krasnaia Gazeta* in 1927 on members of Oberiu and by a journalist from the Leningrad newspaper *Smena* in 1930, who exclaimed that the Oberiuty were against the "dictatorship of the proletariat," are exemplary of the powerful voice of proletarian art, which had no tolerance for absurdism and "nonsense." The nation-wide dissolution of independent literary groups followed soon after the time of this attack. Thus, by the early 1930's all the members of Oberiu were living half-hidden lives as they tried to continue meeting privately and writing for adults in an environment where they could never be accepted, let alone read,

[16] Gibian, p. 31.

[17] Ibid, p. 21.

by their intended audience.

As chance would have it, Kharms found another audience for which he could write with relative freedom: children. The well-known children's editors and writers Samuil Marshak, Nikolai Oleinikov and Evgenii Shvarts learned of Kharms' work for adults and that of other Oberiu members, most notably Kharms' close friend A. Vvedenskii. The dada-like, child-minded outlook on the world and the general playfulness of creation evident in their prose and poetry led to the drafting of the two into the world of children's literature.[18] Thus, Kharms, the would-be "adult" writer, became a much-prized children's author, even though, as has already been stated, this was certainly not his most desired occupation.[19] As was the case with Vvedenskii, for Kharms, "most of these stories and verses for children were just a means of making a living and of holding some kind of official position, or job, at a time when repression made other literary work impossible."[20]

Not only writing for children, but also translating frequently became the employment of persecuted writers. Efim Etkind created a literary scandal as late as 1968 when he suggested that translation was on the increase because more and more serious writers were recognizing the impossibility of publishing their own works due to the inevitable rejection by ideological censors.[21]

[18]See "O Nikolae Oleinikove" in Den' poezii (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1964).

[19]See Stone-Nachimovsky, introduction.

[20]Gibian, p. 27.

Lev Loseff points out that the writing of children's literature was used even more extensively than translation as a means of channeling one's creative impulses:

> Ever since the 1920s... the most prominent writers had extended their energies [to Russian children's literature]: Yesenin, Zoshchenko, Mandelstam, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Platonov, Prishvin; members of the avant-garde group Oberiu—Vvedensky, Zabolotsky, Kharms—and such like-minded writers as Vladimirov, Oleynikov, and Shvarts."[22]

Kharms was invited specifically to work on two newly-created Soviet children's journals for " young pioneers"[23]: *Ezh* (The Hedgehog), for older children (beginning in January, 1928) and *Chizh* (The Siskin) for younger children (beginning in January,1930). In the editorial offices on the 5th floor of the Dom Knigi, home of the children's publishing house <<Detgiz>>, Kharms worked with such young and creative authors as Evgenii Shvarts, Nikolai Oleinikov, Doivber Levin and Yuri Vladimirov—all under the direction of S. Marshak. It was Marshak's personal goal to create a new, exciting and playful children's literature appropriate—and acceptable—for the new generation of young Soviet children, and he was extremely pleased with the

[21] See Efim Etkind, Notes of a Non-Conspirator (Oxford-London-New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 111-15.

[22] Lev Loseff, On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature (Munchen: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1984), p. 193.

[23] A political children's organization for those between the ages of 9 and 14.

contributions of the Oberiu writers that he had recruited: "Самое большее, чего я мог ждать от них в начале—это участие в создании тех перевертышей, скороговорок, припевов, которые так нужны в детской поэзии. Но они оказались способными на гораздо большее."[24] In addition to full-time work on the journals and the creation of recurrent journal characters, during his career as a publicly known and beloved children's writer Kharms also published twelve short books, each consisting of an individual poem or story.[25] But despite this apparent success, throughout his career Kharms was constantly in a precarious position in Soviet society because of his non-conformist thinking, behaviour and writing, which the Soviet system perceived as threatening: he was arrested twice during his lifetime. In 1931 both Kharms and Vvedenskii were accused of "using their nonsense verse to distract the populace from the building of socialism."[26] They were arrested and exiled until 1932. When Kharms returned to Leningrad, he continued to be published, but in 1937 his position became much more uncertain: he submitted for publication a short children's poem about a man who leaves home and never returns, which can perhaps be seen as an allegory of the numerous unseen arrests and disappearances that were taking place under Stalin's regime. Kharms' diary

[24]Letter from Marshak to A. V. Makedonov, 20 December 1963.

[25]Stone-Nakhimovsky, p. 20.

[26]Ibid, p. 24.

account of the days while he was waiting to learn of the impact of the censor's criticism is frightful, and all the more so because at this time, Kharms was starving, waiting hopelessly for the acceptance of a poem and a much-needed paycheck from the children's publishing house.[27] Kharms was hardly published at all after this incident, and the playful, non-conformist journals themselves were in the course of time also forced to cease publication: *Ezh* in 1935 and *Chizh* in 1941. Daniil Kharms, left without any official means of earning money, lived horribly, more or less starving for about three years. Then, on August 23, 1941 in the middle of the night, he was arrested for the second and final time and taken away, half-dressed and in his bedroom slippers. He apparently died on February 2, 1942 under rather hazy circumstances. A frightful KGB photo showing Kharms shortly before death indicates that he likely died of starvation while in prison during the Leningrad blockade.[28] However, there is still much debate over the actual details of his imprisonment and death.[29]

After this final arrest, Kharms was all but forgotten, except by those faithful friends who risked their own safety by keeping his manuscripts. It is understandable why he was not accepted as a

[27]See "Dnevnik Daniila Kharmsa," Knizhnoe obozrenie 19 january 1990, p. 8- 9.

[28]This photo is in the possession of Kharms's sister, Elizaveta Ivanovna Gritsina of Leningrad.

[29]See A. Aleksandrov, "Smert' Daniila Kharmsa," Literaturnaia Gazeta, January, 1990.

children's writer after 1940, when "socialization through children's literature"[30] called for a new type of serious Soviet writer to teach Soviet children about the new Soviet man without any nonsense or purely playful humour. As Soviet citizens were offered page after page of socialist realism, Kharms' work began to circulate underground in *samizdat* publications.[31] In 1956 Kharms was officially rehabilitated, but it took until the 1960's before he was published again: two children's collections appeared in 1962 and 1967. When Kharms was discussed in articles in any depth inside the Soviet Union, it was only as a writer of works for children. In the 1970's and1980's more and more of his children's works appeared, as well as some of his works for adults. In scholarly literature he began to be discussed as a writer for adults. Thus, Kharms gradually was rediscovered in the Soviet Union, as well as abroad in translation.

At the present day, there are important advances in the process of bringing Kharms into a position of posthumous prominence. In April 1990 a major international Kharms drama festival and conference were held in Moscow and in May a complete collection of all of Kharms' works for children went to press.[32] Also, Kharms' works for adults continue to be printed

[30]See F.A. O'Dell, Socialisation through children's literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[31]Stone-Nachimovsky, p. 4.

[32]D. Kharms, Letiat po nebu shariki, ed. A. Alexandrov i N. Kavin (Krasnoiarsk: Krasnoiarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1990).

and reprinted—both in the original and in translation.[33] As an indication of Kharms' rising general popularity, the April 1990 edition of the widely-read journal "Krokodil" featured a Kharms crossword puzzle.[34] But there still remains much to publish and discuss in the work of this still relatively little-known master.

For one, no comparative study of Kharms' children's literature and literature for adults has ever been conducted in any detail,[35] although such a work would be very helpful in understanding the whole of Kharms' œuvre. Polysystem Theory analyses the existence of complex interactions and interrelations between literatures within the literary polysystem. Because Kharms' works consist of literature that is part of the traditionally-viewed center—literature for adults—as well as literature located at the periphery—children's literature—his œuvre can be seen as a microsystem in itself, characterized by a definite interplay between the two literatures. The case of Kharms is made all the more dynamic and interesting as a result of state manipulation of the literary system in the Soviet Union: in the 1920s and 1930s both Kharms' children's literature and his literature for adults were unofficial and uncanonized, with his literature for adults hardly even being published. But now, more than fifty years after

[33] See for example the new English translations of Kharms The Plummeting Old Women, ed. N. Cornwell (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1989).

[34] See: Krokodil, 10, 1990, last page.

[35] A. Gerasimov in "On tak i ostalsia rebenkom" and A. Stone-Nachimovsky have discussed the connection between Kharms's literature for adults and children's literature, but only very briefly.

Kharms was persecuted and subsequently rewritten out of Soviet literary history, his works have been returned to the literary system, and Kharms has consequently been given a second life as a writer for children and a first life as a writer for adults.[36] His works for adults, while still not fully supported in a system in which shelves in book stores are to this day filled with socialist realist literature, have been published relatively widely in the Soviet Union and in the West. Most remarkable, however, is that in their second showing, Kharms' children's works have moved into the limits of canonized literature: "Вновь издаются его стихи и рассказы для детей, им отводится место в антологиях и школьных хрестоматиях."[37]

Now that access to all of Kharms' works is permitted and possible, we can see what features his works "written for children" and those "written for adults" have in common. In fact the first thing that one notices is that often the two seem interchangeable: some of Kharms' children's stories lean toward being frightful like his stories for adults, while several of his adult works start out like children's fairy tales or use language that would make a three year-old laugh: "[Kharms'] poems and stories for children veer toward adult literature; stories and plays for adults resemble literature for children and the writings of the insane."[38]

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[36] A. Alexandrov,"Chudodei" in D. Kharms, Polet v nebesa (Leningrad: Sov. pisatel', 1988), p. 7.

[37] Ibid.

In this study of Kharms' two literatures we are specifically interested in the "child and the child-like" in Kharms, that is first, the analysis of his children's works as part of the traditionally happy, playful genre of children's literature and second, the way in which features that remind us of the child and children's literature find their place as child-like elements in his literature for adults and also how the latter finds its way into his children's works. After discussing Kharms' place in the Soviet literary institution and considering him in light of ideas from Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory and Zohar Shavit's work, *Poetics of Children's Literature*—which is especially relevant and helpful in that it extends certain elements of PS theory specifically to children's literature (chapter 2)—we will consider the way in which Kharms' two literatures are united by play with language, genre and form which characterize the art of a man who was very playful and child-like, if not eccentric, in character (chapter 3). We will then discuss the various characters who live in his child's and adult's universes: i.e., believable playful children in the former and confused or violent child-like adults in the latter. We will conclude that the difference of characters and their respective actions are important distinguishing factors between the two literatures. The children's literature seems to be fun and innocent, whereas the literature for adults largely portrays the

[38]Gibian, p. 42.

very serious nightmare of a world gone mad (chapter 4). Finally, we will discuss how, informed by his literature for adults, we can however see that the nightmare of Kharms' adult world creeps into his 'children's literature in various ways. We will note that the most grim direct correspondence between the two comes in stories about the old. We will conclude that the adult voice of Kharms is clearly heard in his children's literature, though never too loudly, and in both his literatures the reader is shocked by the collision of **a)** playful elements coupled with features which clearly come from the realm of the happy, amusing world of children with **b)** the Kharmsian nightmare which frequently makes laughter turn to horror (chapter 5).

Chapter 2: Kharms and the Literary Institution

Polysystem theory stresses the importance of the intersection of heterogeneous literary subsystems within larger literary systems: translated and original, mass literature and "individual" literature, canonized and non-canonized etc. While these divisions are suitable for the study of the evolution or development of world literature as a very broad phenomenon, they are also applicable to rare cases when the œuvre of a single author operates in a system of its own. Itamar Even-Zohar mentions the specific issue which interests us: "...literature for children is not considered a phenomenon *sui generis*, but is related to literature for adults."[39] In Daniil Kharms we are dealing with an author whose children's literature—the literature of the traditional periphery within the literary system—may certainly be considered generally in relation to literature for adults, i.e. literature of the traditional center. However, his children's works must first and foremost be studied alongside his own literature for adults. Kharms is a unique case in that not only did he write a great deal for both children and adults, but also his two literatures are very closely related: "First of all, not many writers write for both children and adults. Secondly, if they do, as a result of being aware of the differences between the two readers, they write very different stories."[40] A good example of a more typical case

[39]Itamar Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," Poetics Today 4, 1979, p. 292.

[40]Zohar Shavit, Poetics of Children's Literature (Atlanta: University of Georgia

of an "adult" author who also wrote for children is Lev Tolstoy. Apart from his distinctly "adult" body of literature Tolstoy wrote a small number of children's stories, which are aimed specifically at a child audience and were written in accessible language and form to carry across highly didactic messages.[41]

That Daniil Kharms was forced to become "two writers" and that these two are closely tied is due to unique political and historical circumstances. Even-Zohar speaks of the "need of disentangling the knotty complex which constitutes the conditions under which a writer works, part of which consists of certain pertinent constraints, while another is a function of the writer's ability to create new conditions not imposed on him but *by* him."[42] In the given case the conditions and constraints imposed on and by Kharms in the Soviet Union of the1920s and 1930s are painfully simple and tragic. Due to the prevailing political situation, Kharms was obliged to keep the "adult writer" hidden away from view: he could write freely but with no hope of publishing his work. The "children's writer" was allowed to be

Press, 1986), p. 44.

[41] In many of Tolstoy's children's works the literary narrative seems to be a mere pretext for moral lessons, e.g. "Staryi ded i vnuchek". Although didactic elements may be found in Tolstoy's literature for adults, they are not the dominant that they are in his children's works. Admittedly, in Tolstoy's later works for adults, e.g., Voskresenie, the didactic message began to play a much more prominent role; however, this caused immeasurable harm to the literary qualities of the works in question, which is why this author is best known for novels and short stories that precede this later period.

[42] Even-Zohar, p. 294.

public and gave Kharms' "adult" voice an outlet through which he often presented "toned-down" versions of features that we find in his literature for adults. However, the children's writer, by letting the voice of the writer for adults be heard and not writing stories and poetry that would be guaranteed to please the censors, was the object of virulent criticism. As is clear from Kharms' tragic fate, in the Soviet Union of the Stalinist era this did not just result in the relegation of Kharms' works to the level of the "non-official."

Because of their importance in helping with indoctrination, official state-approved children's writers in the Soviet Union, who wrote first and foremost for the censors, were traditionally much more esteemed than most other world children's writers. When compared with their pre-Gorbachev Soviet counterparts, children's authors in Western countries have always had an inferior status both in society and within the literary polysystem.[43] Soviet writers for children were extremely well-respected and praised, and their works were automatically manipulated into becoming offically canonized literature. e.g. Chukovski, Barto, Marshak et al. While plenty of Soviet artists have turned to adapting their work to current ideology in order to gain official approval, Kharms apparently wanted to avoid giving in. While it is evident that he tried to keep his children's works at an "acceptable" level of absurdity and some of his works have the

[43]Shavit, chapter 2.

token mention of such censor-pleasing words as "pioneer," "Soviet motherland" etc., most of his children's stories, as well as his poetry, are certainly not didactic or politicized enough to have met official requirements. Rather, they are characterized as being playful, upbeat and entertaining, with, if anything, little hints against didacticism and conformist society. Kharms, for example, wrote one very well-known children's poem entitled "Million," which was praised and interpreted by the censors as a tribute to the young pioneers, and each time it was published it was accompanied by illustrations of marching pioneers. However, on closer analysis "Million" is really an apolitical counting game which reaches a climax in a somewhat absurd scene as "almost a million," or exactly 800120 children, are walking down the street for no apparent reason. We know an interesting fact about "Million": after a long debate in the editorial room of the children's publishing house the word "pioneers" was substituted for the word "boys" in the poem just before it was to be printed for the first time. This indicates that Kharms most likely did not have pioneers in mind when he wrote the poem. Furthermore, Lev Loseff discusses the possibility of Aesopian language in "Million," and, although he sometimes stretches plausibility to the limit, the poem does seem to voice an apolitical stance.

Other Soviet children's authors also sometimes strayed from

the ideological function of their field, often writing playful works where their main concern was with entertaining the child instead of guiding him down the road to a socialist utopia. Thus, alongside such highly propagandistic children's works as Maiakovski's *Chto takoe khorosho i chto takoe plokho* or Marshak's *Mister Tvister,* we find pure fun and games in Chukovsky's *Telefon* and *Mukha Tsikatukha* or in Marshak's *Chelovek rasseiannyi s ulitsy Basseinoi.* However, whereas most Soviet authors only infrequently permitted themselves to drop the ideology from their children's works, Kharms hardly ever bothered to include it. It was perhaps for this that he ended paying with his life.

Although Kharms was lucky to be offered a chance to make his living through children's literature, he entered a field, which, aside from being very limiting in the Soviet Union because of strict political censorship, has always been under the careful surveillance of parents and educators all over the world; they often tend to call for rigid educational requirements in the works read by their children or students. This attitude towards children's literature has been developing over the past few centuries. Prior to the 17th century a special literature for children did not exist. But as society began to adopt the notion of the child as a special creature, sweet and innocent, and in need of shaping in spiritual and other matters, a separate children's literature began to emerge.[44] Since then the debate over what

[44]See Shavit, chapter 1.

children should read and what children's literature should contain has been going on throughout the world. However, in the Soviet Union the role of literature in educating the youngest members of society politically and shaping their character —*vospitanie* is the Russian term that conveys this notion— turned children's literature into a vital manipulative and political tool. "Undesirable elements" were quickly weeded out: instead of allowing unacceptable literature to exist on the level of the "non-canonized" or "unofficial"—as is the case in the West, those writers who did not meet the demands of the state were banned or otherwise eliminated.

There was also basically one line of literary criticism and literary ideology, which often forced the writer out of the literary world. In a healthy, non-stagnant system "facts of 'literary life,' i.e., literary establishments such as criticism (not scholarship), publishing houses, periodicals and other mediating factors [which] are often 'translation' functors of the 'more remote' constraining socio-cultural system"[45] are characterized as having divergent views on specific works and authors. For Kharms, on the other hand, state-imposed dogma and general notions about the overall educational goals of literature resulted in constant chastisement at the hands of "orthodox" zealous critics. A typical attack in 1929 on the playfulness of the journal "Ezh" was concluded in the

[45]Even-Zohar, p. 297.

following way: "Неужели Главсоцвос серьезно думает, что эти курьезы, эта библиотечная гниль—есть орудие классового воспитания?"[46]

Because the system had essentially not changed significantly when Kharms' children's works were resurrected with the 1962 publication of a collection of 11 children's poems entitled "Igra," his work was met with criticism which echos that of earlier days:

> Научный сотрудник Научно—исследовательского института языка и литературы пишет в редакцию «Литературной России»: Если хотите иметь пособие по тарабарщине—купите книгу «Игра». Почитайте и вы наверняка согласитесь, что всему этому есть простое, но емкое название—ХАЛТУРА.[47]

And here is a Moscow teacher who writes: "[автор «Игры»] унижает достоинство человека и учит детей тому, с чем воспитатели активно борются."[48] After everyone had been taught to think the same way about the utilitarian value of literature, such comments were predictable and very widespread.

It is noteworthy that even in present-day articles on Kharms' children's literature, scholars, anticipating an all too familiar

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[46]B. Shatilov, "Ezh" Oktiabr' 12 1929, p. 189. Note the literature-tool association [cf. my discussion above - L. K.-T.].

[47]N. Khalatov, "Daniil Kharms-kto zhe on nakonets," Detskaia literatura 1, 1966, p. 24.

[48]Ibid.

negative reaction, stress the fact that Kharms' works will not harm children[49] and that they even offer unique educational possibilities:

> Сейчас все больше и больше людей (в том числе педагоги и редакторы детских книг) начинают понимать, что игра не только очень приятная, но и очень полезная.[50]
>
> Or
>
> Педагог и родители прививают ребенку разумный взгляд на мир, приучают к моральной оценке. Искусство же развивает воображение ребенка, одухотворяет эмоции и интелект.[51]

Unfortunately this defense of Kharms came too late to save him. In the final account, like so many others throughout human history, Kharms died because of his words. His children's literature was non-conformist and unique; it fueled the paranoia of the authorities—initially stemming from Oberiu connections—who perceived Kharms as a threat.

The case of Kharms is fascinating from a literary point of view in that his children's literature and literature for adults are very much interrelated and it is also very interesting from a historical perspective: we see an author who wrote both for children and for

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[49] Pun not intended.

[50] M. Petrovskii, "Vozvrashchenie Daniila Kharmsa," Novyi Mir 8, 1968, p. 258.

[51] Aleksandrov, p. 31. [Note the pervasive notion of children's literature as a didactic tool — L. K.-T.]

adults because of the unique and horrible conditions imposed upon him under the terror of Stalinist Russia. Besides, an analysis of Kharms is valuable in that it paves the way for the study of other authors who wrote both children's literature and literature for adults. It is true that "only a short time ago, children's literature was not even considered a legitimate field of research in the academic world."[52] However, now that this field is gradually gaining acceptance, we should turn to doing scholarly studies which focus on the literary aspects of children's literature—not the educational aspects, as has been the tradition in the past. [53] Whenever unique cases such as that of Kharms arise, we should take advantage of the author's body of work for adults to gain an insight into his children's literature.

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[52] Shavit, p. ix.

[53] cf. Shavit's comments on the "didacticist" trend in the study of children's literature in the preface to her above-mentioned book.

Chapter 3: Playing With Language, Genre and Form

Numerous articles and memoirs on Kharms link his child-like approach to art and his talent for writing children's literature to his own unique child-like personality and antics. An article entitled "On tak i ostalsia rebenkom" explains that "**для Хармса детскость была не чертой а всем его существом**,"[54] and a knowledge of his person certainly helps us to understand his art. In his everyday life Kharms wanted to shock the world, subvert its conventions, do humourous and eccentric things.[55] The list of personal anecdotes is endless. First there is a number of stories describing the ways in which Kharms pretended to be part of pre-revolutionary genteel circles. For example, he would put on a false moustache before going to the theater, saying that it was improper to go out without one. Whenever he went to a bar, he would bring his own silver goblets—"family heirlooms," he would say—and drink from nothing but them. Sometimes he would raise toasts to the Tsar. Or he would dress up and play the role of his imaginary brother, a dean at the old University of Petersburg. However, all this play was very daring in a paranoid society:

> Kharms not only wrote verse, drama, and fantastic stories, but he also made his life into a work of absurd fantasy. His

[54] A. Gerasimova, "On tak i ostalsia rebenkom," Detskaia Literatura 4, 1988, p. 35.

[55] The concept of zhiznetvorchestvo,—the incorporation of elements from one's artistic activity into one's life—is also relevant to such authors as Oscar Wilde, Maiakovskii and a number of romantic poets, such as Byron or Lermontov [cf B. Tomashevskii, "Literatura i biografiia," Kniga v revolutsii, 1923.].

> pranks and eccentricities somewhat resembled those of his Western European counterparts. Alfred Jarry, Francis Picabia, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Tristan Tzara, but in the supposedly classless and revolutionary Soviet society in which he lived his behavior was not merely incongruous; it was also provocative. Trainloads of people accused of being former noblemen were being deported from Leningrad at the time Kharms affected aristocratic mannerisms in a desperate game of insubordination.[56]

Aside from these feigned nobility antics, the list of playful anecdotes contains other shockingly funny episodes. Kharms would put a carrot instead of a flower in his button hole. He would walk around the streets of Leningrad wearing a sign: "Смерть клопам." One time on a dare he walked down Nevskii Street in pyjamas with a large cross around his neck and attempted to go unnoticed. He once sent around notes to the audience at a concert informing everyone that he was going to change the spelling of his name from "Kharms" to "Charms." Incidentally, Kharms' play with his pseudonyms was much more extensive than this: he used them to make others think that he was a foreigner, which was yet another shock for the xenophobic Soviet society:

> Даниил Иванович Ювачев всегда подписывал свои произведения псевдонимами, стилизуя их по большой части под иностранные имена. Одно- будто бы английское: Чармс (или Хармс). Другое-

[56] Gibian, p. 13.

> вроде немецкое: Карл Иванович Шустерлинг. Третье—словно французское: Шардам. Четвертое—неведомо какое: Дандан. Важна была не национальность этого вымышленного иностранца, а сам факт, что он иностранец.[57]

Kharms pushed his childish games to the limit when he pretended he could fly: "Я даже летать умею. Но об этом рассказывать не буду, потому что все равно никто не поверит."[58] As Kharms' friend Vvedenskii once commented "Kharms is art,"[59] and clearly Kharms' desire to be out of the ordinary and shock a world that was used to the banality of every day life finds its reflection in a playful literature which most notably plays with and alters language and challenges traditional formal and generic aspects of literature, especially established literary conventions.

An overall playfulness and child-like spirit characterize both Kharms' children's literature and his literature for adults and draw the two closely together.

Play with language in Kharms, which often results in baby sounds or nonsense syllables coming out of characters' mouths, is very common, and, in spite of the Oberiu manifesto (cf. above), echoes similar Futurist experimentation, e.g. V. Khlebnikov's transrational poems. For example, in Kharms' 1928 play

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[57] Petrovskii, p. 259.

[58] Polet v nebesa, p. 449.

[59] Gibian, p. 7.

"Elizaveta Bam" Elizaveta prolongs her cry to the point of absurdity: "У-у-у-у

Whereas the old man's laughter is given in a conventional way at first: "Ха-ха-ха, да хе-хе-хе, ху-ху-ху," this traditional Russian "laughter notation" is followed by sounds which are normally not used in Russian to indicate laughter or, for that matter, anything else. This conventional or rational beginning and eccentric or absurd continuation reflect a general sequential pattern in Kharms' work: in a typical Kharmsian series, set or list of elements the usual normally comes first and the deviation acts as a kind of disruption of the reader's expectations. Therefore, a familiar background is established by the conventional Kharmsian beginning, and an unfamiliar foreground shocks the reader out of his automatized stupor.

In the children's story called "Xvastun Kolpakov" we see another creative, entertaining use of language. The braggart Kolpakov tries to prove his bravery by diving into the water, whereupon, as he sinks, he utters the delightful and meaningless "нэв... нэв... нэв..."[64] instead of the conventional "буль... буль... буль...," which is normally used in Russian to approximate the sound made by a drowning person. Yet another funny bit of language comes in an unfinished children's story about a dog who shows his painting to all sorts of animals, including a monkey. Unlike the other animals in the story the monkey speaks in uncomprehensible syllables: "Бал бал бал

[64] Letiat po nebu shariki, p. 153.

бал/Бол бол бол бол/Лок вок мок рор/Лук лак лик лек!"[65]

This sort of speech is highly reminiscent of a poem written by Professor Trubochkin, one of Kharms' well-known children's characters who appeared in a series of adventures in the 1933 editions of "Chizh:" "Жик жик жик./Фок фок фок./Рик рик рик./Шук шук шук."[66] The professor explains that the poem is written in the language called "Fistoltian." Related nonsensical utterances are especially impressive in the adult poem "Mest'" as the character of Faust exclaims to the "writers:" "Руа рео/ кио лау/ кони фиу/ пеу боу. Мыс. Мыс. Мыс."[67] We also see a fascinating use of language when inanimate objects speak, e.g., the violin in "Elizaveta Bam" exclaims: "На-на-ни-на/ на-на-ни-на" and the siren says "Виа, виа, виа, виа."[68] This agglomeration of morphemes or phonemes, which in many cases are not even Russian, serves to de-automatize our sense of the Russian language, to push our normal phonic reflexes out of their familiar pathways.

In a number of Kharms' stories linguistic games are also applied to names—an old and honoured tradition in Russian literature, going back to Fonvizin, Gogol, Chekhov and many

[65] Ibid, p. 149.

[66] Ibid, p. 124. [Actually the person who utters these sounds is an impostor impersonating the professor. — L. K.-T.]

[67] Polet v nebesa, p. 101.

[68] Ibid, p. 192-3.

others. Kharms' works for adults abound with diminutives and curious made-up names, which frequently appear in pairs. We have in one work the characters "Voda i Khniu," the latter being an invented meaningless "word." The characters "Mashkin i Koshkin," "Fed'ka i Sen'ka" and "Pakin i Rakukin" are parallel pairs. Although these characters are adults, they engage in child-like behavior, such as groundless fighting, which is echoed by their child-like names. In two unfinished children's stories two humorous and impossible names of dogs are mentioned: "Тынмынфынбын" and "Бубубу."[69] Apparently Kharms gave a similarly absurd—although not altogether meaningless—name to his own dog. One acquaintance of Kharms recalls asking the name of Kharms' dog:

> —Простите, как зовут вашу собачку!
> —Пожалуйста.—Он приподнял свою потертую соломенную шляпу. Ее зовут — Чти-память-дня-сражения-при Фермопилах...[70]

Kharms added that when he was in a hurry, he called his dog simply "Чти" or more familiarly, "Шти" for short.[71]

The issue of names and naming continues as in a work which may easily be for adults or for children. An Englishman is

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[69] Druskin Fund in the Archives Department of The Saltykov-Shchedrin Library in Leningrad #219, sheet 17.

[70] B. Semenov. "Chudak istinnyj i radostnyj," in Avrora 1, 1977, p. 69.

[71] Of course the latter name is meaningless and is in no way a shortened version of the former name.

apparently trying to recall how to say chicken ("курица") in Russian. He comes up with all sorts of humourous sound combinations without hitting exactly the right one:

> Один англичанин никак не мог вспомнить как эта птица называется:
>
> —Это,—говорит,—крюкица. Ах нет не крюкица, а кирюкица. Или нет не кирюкица, а курякица. Фу ты![72] Не курякица, а кукрикица. Да и не кукрикица, а кирикрюкица.[73]

One could perceive in the Englishman's confusion a feature, which may be attributed to many of Kharms' characters: they tend to be puzzled by everyday reality and desperately try to find the right name for an object in order to gain more control over life. The basic premise in this naming "quest" seems to be the idea that in naming something a person tries to define and organize nature, that is to create a definite order in a place where there is none, i.e., to name is to create.[74]

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[72]This highly colloquial exclamation is rarely if ever used by foreigners, which may be an indication of the random way in which Kharms normally selects the identity of his characters: the fact that the puzzled man is English is unimportant, since Russian characters in Kharms's stories often forget equally unbelievable things. For example, in one story the narrator forgets which number comes first: seven or eight. The random selection of a character's identity is prevalent in Kharms's work, creating the impression that referential considerations (identities that make sense in the real world) often yield to phonic and/or ludic goals.

[73]Letiat po nebu shariki, p. 154.

[74]John Killinger, World in Collapse: The Vision of Absurd Drama (New York: Dell, 1971), p. 91.

This play with words, individual phonemes and morphemes is part of the broader ludic formal patterns in Kharms' work. His favourite game seems to be the destruction or distortion of various literary genres, which is often so shocking that it constitutes a brutal attack on the reader's preconceived literary baggage.

One such genre game involves the fairy tale, with which every one young and old is so familiar:

> The fairy tale, writes Martin Esslin, seems to me one of the most important and influential of all literary genres: after all, most children, and therefore also most writers, receive their first and decisive impulses to the future workings of their imaginations from the tales they are told as children.[75]

Taking familiarity with this genre as a given, Kharms plays with the most basic fairy-tale conventions in several of his stories. In the children's story interestingly called "Skazka,"[76] there are two children: Vania, who wants to write a typical fairy tale, and Lenochka, who says that each fairy tale proposed by Vania has been written; she then proceeds to tell her extremely unique versions of them. For example, Vania suggests writing about a criminal and Lenochka tells the absurd tale of the criminal who tried to escape on a horse but had a lot of trouble:

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[75]Martin Esslin, "Ionesco and the Fairytale Tradition," The Dream and the Play: Ionesco's Theatrical Quest ed. Moshe Lazar (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1982, p. 22.

[76]In Russian this word means "fairy tale."

> Разбойник вскочил на лошадь, да с размаху перевалился на другую сторону и упал на землю. Разбойник выругался и опять вскочил на лошадь но снова не расчитал прыжка, перевалился на другую сторону и упал на землю... Тогда разбойник сорвал с головы шапку, растоптал ее ногами и опять прыгнул на лошадь, и опять перемахнул через нее, шлепнулся на землю и сломал себе ногу. А лошадь отошла в сторону. Разбойник, прихрамывая, подбежал к лошади и ударил её кулаком по лбу. Лошадь убежала. В это время прискакали стражники, схватили разбойника и отвели его в тюрьму.[77]

In this anti-climactic piece nothing much happens: it is a story that, like its protagonist, seems unable to get moving. The fairy tale, which is normally full of action and adventure, becomes a failure caused by the simple laws of gravity pushed to the point of absurdity. Such considerations usually have no bearing on fantasy in the more conventional manifestations of the fairy tale genre.

In Kharms' literature for adults there are two other "deformed" fairy tales; one is called playfully "Skasska"—a phonetic transliteration of the word "Skazka"—and the other bears the title "Novyi talantlivyi pisatel'." In the former, the conventional fairy tale beginning "Жил-был" seems to promise the kind of story that most readers are familiar with.[78] However, it introduces

[77] Polet v nebesa, p. 276.

[78] The English equivalent is "Once upon a time..."

not a character from a work of fantasy, but an ordinary person with an ordinary name: "Semenov." As he is walking along, this absent-minded adult character loses everything he has and then eventually "loses himself," so that nothing else can happen in the story: it has to end. Just as in the story about the criminal, the fairy tale adventures that we might expect are over before they even begin:

> Жил-был один человек, звали его Семенов. Пошел однажды Сененов гулять и потерял носовой платок. Семенов начал искать носовой платок и потерял шапку. Начал шапку искать и потерял куртку. Начал куртку искать и потерял сапоги.
>
> —Ну, сказал Семенов, этак все растеряешь. Пойду лучше домой.
>
> Пошел Семенов домой и заблудился.
>
> —Нет, сказал Семенов, лучше я сяду и посижу.
>
> Сел Семенов на камушек и заснул.[79]

Here, just as in the story about the criminal, a series of mishaps is multiplied to the point of absurdity, i.e., one or two of these misadventures could be accepted by the reader as something believable, but they are so numerous that their sheer number takes centre stage and pushes the story line into the background. Our attention is attracted not by the what happens but by how many times it happens.

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[79]Published in Jean-Philippe Jaccard, "De la réalité au texte: l'absurde chez Daniil Harms," Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique, XXVI (3-4) juil-déc. 1985, pp. 269-312.

The story "Novyi talantlivyi pisatel'" starts off just like the previous story, i.e., with a conventional beginning that seems to promise the ordinary material of fairy tales: there is a prince in a castle. However, it quickly takes a twist, as the subject of the work becomes the prince's drunkeness:

> В одном старинном замке жил принц, страшный пьяница. А жена этого принца, наоборот, не пила даже чаю, только воду и молоко пила. А муж ее пил водку и вино, а молока не пил. Да и жена его, собственно говоря, тоже водку пила, но скрывала это. А муж был бесстыдник и не скрывал. ‹‹Не пью молока, а водку пью!››—говорил он всегда. А жена тихонько, из-под фартука, вынимала баночку и хлоп, значит, выпивала...[80]

Once again we have a story that does not seem able to take off: a background description continues for longer than expected and abounds with ridiculous and clearly associative narrative.

The fable is another well-known literary genre with which Kharms plays in both his children's literature and literature for adults. Aesop's famous "The Tortoise and the Hare," which was translated into Russian by Krylov, is the model for a children's story, which is made absurd from the very opening sentence—there are more characters than usually appear in any ordinary fable, and one of them, "жирафа," is given in the wrong gender:

[80] Published in "V shutku i vser'ez" ed. V. Glotser in Voprosy Literatury 8, 1987, p. 266

Однажды лев, слон, жирафа, олень, страус, лось, дикая лошадь и собака поспорили, кто из них быстрее всех бегает.

Спорили, спорили и чуть было не подрались.

Услыхал Гриша Апельсинов, что звери спорят, и говорит им:

—Эх вы, глупые звери! Зря вы спорите! Вы лучше устройте состязание. Кто первый вокруг озера обежит, то, значит, и бегает быстрее всех.[81]

The absurd results of the race challenge the expectations of the reader: the lion, similar to the hare in the original fable, drops off to sleep under the palm trees; the ostrich, wanting to get ahead suggests to the moose and the giraffe that they all three quickly drink the water from the lake and then run across the dry lake bed; then the cunning ostrich leaves the other two to drink and runs off alone—but in the wrong direction, toward the start; the elephant sees the moose and the giraffe drinking the lake and cannot stop laughing; the dog, who has fleas, stops running and cannot stop scratching; the horse and the deer win the race, thereby defeating the traditional "single victor" ending.

The "Chetveronogaia vorona" is a fable for adults which I found in the Kharms archives in Leningrad. It is modelled on the well-known Aesopian fable: "The Fox and the Crow":

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[81] Polet v nebesa, p. 272.

Жила была четвероногая ворона. Собственно говоря у нее было пять ног, но об этом говорить не стоит.

Вот однажды купила себе четвероногая ворона кофе и думает: ‹‹Ну вот, купила я себе кофе, а что с ним делать?››

А тут, как на беду, пробегала мимо [одноногая— crossed out in the manuscript — L. K.-T.] лиса. Увидала она ворону и кричит ей: ‹‹Эй, кричит, ты, ворона!››

А ворона лисе кричит:

‹‹Сама ты ворона!››

А лиса вороне кричит:

‹‹А ты, ворона, свинья!››

Тут ворона от обиды рассыпала кофе. А лиса прочь побежала. А ворона слезла на землю и пошла на своих четырех, или точнее, на пяти ногах в свой паршивый дом.[82]

The absurd elements have a structural/ludic logic of their own in this fable. Although the crow is four-legged, the fox is one-legged, acting as the absurd symmetrical complement to this avian "multipodicity." Furthermore, the crow takes offense when the fox calls it a crow, and this absurd "insult" stands in opposition to the praise offered by the fox in Aesop's original fable. This strange insult, just like the praise in the original, acts as the pivotal point in the plot development of this fable, since the crow drops the coffee when it opens its mouth to retort: "Crow yourself!" In this mad context the reader is so taken aback that he can easily forget

[82] Druskin Fund, #367.

to ask how a crow manages to hold coffee in its beak and why it returns to its "wretched home." As in the previous fable for children, in this one there is no moral whatsoever, which constitutes a violation of a major convention—if not the goal—characterizing this genre.

Kharms continues to parody the didactic in literature in a short children's story called "Rybii Zhir." A little boy gets a ten-kopeck coin every time he has a spoonful of horrible tasting cod-liver oil, and he puts every ten-kopeck coin in his piggy bank. When asked what he does with all his money, he gives an answer which indicates that he will have to suffer forever, in an endless ridiculous cycle:

> —Ну а потом же? спросили Вову.
> —А потом, когда у меня в копилке накапливается два рубля, сказал Вова, то мама вынимает их из копилки и покупает мне опять бутылку рыбьего жира.[83]

The vicious circle transforms the didactic into the futile, placing the fundamental notion of "text as behaviour guide" on its head.

As shown above, upsetting the reader's conventional expectations is a favourite device in Kharms' work. In a story about the circus the author uses this technique in order to disrupt our expectations not about literary forms but regarding public

[83] Jaccard, p. 286.

performance genres. In a script for a play about a children's circus the director begins to introduce the circus acts. Unexpectedly, the first act jumps out of the confines of a traditional or even not so traditional circus tent and leaps into a bizarre fantasy in a desert, which, unlike the closed circus ring, is the image of seemingly infinite space:

> К Цирку Шардам, вставные номера.
> Директор: Жила была Эстер Бубушвилли. И вот села она однажды на верблюда и поехала через пустыню в гости к своей тете. [Выезжает Эстер на верблюде]. Солнце палит. Вокруг песок. Дует горячий ветер. Дует горячий ветер. Вокруг песок. А солнце палит. [Note the ludic effect produced by this mirroring of identical elements. — L. K.-T.] Эстер Бубушвилли смотрит направо, смотрит налево. Ей хочется пить. Запас воды кончается. Вокруг песок. Воды нигде нет. Ай ай ай![84]

This circus is reminiscent of a children's poem by Kharms which similarly plays with the traditional circus genre. Although the setting of the poem is a conventional circus tent, the characters and acts are ones which only Kharms' imagination could and would include in a circus. It includes insect performers and a parrot that eats a soaked radish; our expectations are thwarted. Note that the choice of performers is governed more by phonic considerations than by anything else. This illustrates the point I

[84] In a telephone interview, A. Aleksandrov said that a whole children's play by Kharms which has not yet been published is based on the "Cirk Shardam."

made earlier regarding the random way in which Kharms often choses the identity of his characters:

Цирк Принтинпрам
Невероятное представление. Новая программа
Сто коров,
Двести бобров,
Четыреста двадцать
Ученых комаров
Покажут сорок
Удивительных
Номеров.[85]

Public performance genres are also distorted in Kharms' literature for adults. In "Neudachnyi Spektakl'" characters enter one after the other but are unable to speak, as each one begins to vomit and has to run off stage. After four characters enter and quickly exit in this manner, a little girl comes out to close the show: "*Выходит маленькая девочка... Маленькая девочка:* Папа просил передать вам всем, что театр закрывается. Нас всех тошнит!"[86] Just as in some of Kharms' above-mentioned works, this play never manages to begin.

Quite similarly in "Tiuk" the play cannot get off the ground as Evdokim Osipovich keeps interrupting Ol'ga Petrovna by exclaiming a single word: "Тюк!" Naturally this drives her nearly

[85] Polet v nebesa, p. 254.

[86] Ibid, p. 379.

insane.

The ludic elements in Kharms' œuvre link his children's literature with his literature for adults, first creating the impression that a familiar genre is about to be used and then destroying it convention by convention in a mad but often very symmetrical and structurally logical game. It is interesting that games in Kharms were not only an important feature of his behaviour and his works of fiction, but they also play a prominent role in his personal correspondence. In one letter he plays with the conventions of the traditional salutation and opening questions:

> 1 августа 1932 Курск
>
> Дорогая Тамара Александровна, Валентина Ефимовна, Леонид Савельевич, Яков Семенович и Валентина Ефимовна.
>
> Передайте от меня привет Леониду Савельевичу, Валентине Ефимовне и Якову Семеновичу.
>
> Как вы живете, Тамара Александровна, Валентина Ефимовна, Леонид Савельевич и Яков Семенович? Что поделывает Валентина Ефимовна? Обязательно напишите мне, Тамара Александровна, как себя чувствуют Яков Семенович и Леонид Савельевич.[87]

Here, the deviation from the norm resides in very simple features: the number of addressees and the various combinations of their

[87] Ibid, p. 470.

names in different sentences. The use of the formal patronymics adds an additional ludic element to this list of addressees, contrasting with the clearly playful—and therefore informal—tone of the text.

Chapter 4: The Characters—Children and Child-Like Adults

It is not inappropriate to say that Kharms shows us a universe of children. However, while child characters are the norm in children's literature and are one of the main features distinguishing it from literature for adults,[88] child-like adults abound in Kharms' literature for adults. They are often confused, strangely misplaced and helpless in an absurd world devoid of inherent order and direction. Aside from child and child-like characters in Kharms' two literatures, we also see one other noteworthy character type: in some works for adults there are animal-like children, who are perceived by the child-like adults as a threat and should therefore be punished. These animal-children are in great contrast to the children of Kharms' children's literature. In Kharms' literature for adults the child-like adults along with the wretched children are part of a nightmarish vision, which distorts the conventional idea and ideal of the innocent child and the child-like. On the other hand, the children in Kharms' children's literature are not trying to make sense of a perplexing world; instead they are usually portrayed enjoying themselves and playing. However, as I intend to demonstrate in chapter 5, their behaviour and the behaviour of those around them are by no means as conventional as they may appear at first glance.

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[88] Myles McDowell, "Fiction for Children and Adults: Some Essential Differences" in Writers, Critics and Children eds. Fox, Geoff et al. (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), p. 141.

The normality or calm innocence in Kharms' children's literature lies in the fact that the child characters partake in happy or silly, typical children's activities: we see children at play, children in the process of creating or discovering and children doing destructive or nasty things that they often do or would like to do but in the minds of adults should not.

Here are a few examples of the typically child-like in Kharms' children's stories. The model work which epitomizes the idea of child's play is a poem suitably called "Igra" (Play). It has the classic fairy tale architectonic structure: three young boys pretend to be a car, a mail ship and a Soviet airplane. The poem is full of dynamic action, which is also typical of children's literature,[89] and it comes alive with verbal play as each character tells the others what he is doing and imitates the sound of his respective vehicle: "Та-ра-рар!" "Ду-ду-ду!" and "Жу-жу-жу!" When a cow comes along and blocks their path, thereby interrupting the game for a time, its animal sound "Му-му-му," creates a playful contrast with the mechanical sound imitations made by the three boys.

In two of Kharms' stories we watch children trying to go on fantastic adventures. In "Kak Kol'ka Pankin letel v Braziliiu i Pet'ka Ershov nichemu ne veril" we see one boy imagining a whole glorious adventure in Brazil, as he envisions local, everyday

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[89] Ibid.

features of Leningrad around him as part of the exotic and exciting setting in his imaginary South American locale. The second boy tries to disrupt this game by not playing along and bringing the flight of Kol'ka's imagination down to earth:

—Ты видел бизона?—спросил Колька.
—Где?— спросил Петька.
—Да ну, там. Он кинулся на нас,—сказал Колька.
—А это не корова была?—спросил Петька.
—Что ты, какая же это корова? В Бразилии нет коров,—сказал Колька.[90]

In "Vo-pervykh i vo-vtorykh" we see a merry group, consisting of two boys, the smallest man in the world, the tallest man in the world and several animals, travelling together to no particular destination in utter bliss, whistling or singing all the way. The whole story is told like many children's works and folktales, in which adventure is cumulative. The story proceeds in sections from "во-первых" to "в-десятых" and in each section the group finds a new mode of transportation. Incidentally, the use of "во-первых" to "в-десятых" as headings for the ten sections of the story involves an interesting play with convention, since normally this numerical sequencing ends, as in English, at "в-третьих."

В седьмых, вышли мы на другой берег, смотрим—стоит автомобиль. <<Что ж это такое может

[90]D. Kharms, Chto eto bylo? (Moscow: <<Malysh>>, 1967), n.p.

быть?»– говорит длинный человек. ‹‹Что это?›› – говорит маленький человек. ‹‹Это,–говорю я,– автомобиль››.–Это машина, на которой мы сейчас и поедем››,–говорит Петька.[91]

In a poem "Vrun" we see a boy acting like a very typical child by asserting numerous outrageous facts. Each time he does so, a whole group of children, ignoring the most unbelievable elements of the little liar's assertions, question various insignificant details in his statements. For example, to his claim that a soldier with a rifle is standing guard on the bottom of the ocean they reply: "Ну! Ну! Ну! Ну!/ Врешь! Врешь! Врешь! Врешь!/ Ну, с дубинкой,/ Ну с метелкой,/ Ну еще туда сюда,/ А с заряженным ружьем–/ Это просто ерунда!"[92]

As these examples demonstrate, in his children's works Kharms captures the life and behaviour of children, adding a touch of fantasy or the absurd. For his ability to see children as they are and to see the world as if from their point of view, Kharms has been highly praised:

Этот талантливый поэт...обладал редкостным даром понимать ребенка и быть участником его веселой игры. Умению писать для самых маленьких у Хармса могут поучиться многие авторы книг для детей. Радостное восприятие мира, причудливое воображение, способность играть словом–все эти

[91] Polet v nebesa, p. 259.

[92] Ibid, p 245.

свойства, присущие нашей поэзии для детей, в частности поэзии Д. Хармса,—так же необходимы для нормального роста ребенка, как витамины в пище."[93]

There is, however, little doubt that Kharms was obliged to present this positive view of playful children in concordance with one of the very basic principles of children's literature: "children's books tend to be optimistic rather than depressive."[94] This requirement was coupled with the fact that Kharms, as we have already mentioned, had to write with parents, educators and censors in mind. We know an ironic fact which seems to contradict the positive, playful view of children presented in this children's literature: personally Kharms had a very negative view of children, and he certainly did not see them as nearly such delightful creatures as those he portrays in his stories and poems for children: "Kharms, who apparently did not like children, had the ability to see the world with the eyes of a child and the artistry of a writer."[95] This comment seems to be supported by personal statements found in the Kharms archives in Leningrad. For example: "*Я не люблю детей, стариков, старух и благоразумных.*"[96] And further on the same page is the macabre remark: "*Травить детей—это жестоко. Но что-*

[93] S. Marshak, Sobranie cochinenii volume 8, Moscow 1972, p. 531.

[94] McDowell, p. 141.

[95] Stone-Nachimovsky, p. 20.

[96] Druskin Fund, #219, sheet 50.

нибудь ведь надо же с ними делать." Another interesting document is a little book, consisting of a few sheets of paper sewn together, which contains no words except for those on the front cover: "Евстигнеев смеется: юмористический рассказ для детей и дураков."[97] Also in the autobiographical work "Ia reshil rastrepat' odnu kompaniiu," we read the following: "Вот другое дело дети. О них говорят, что они невинны, да только уж больно омерзительны, в особенности когда пляшут. Я всегда ухожу оттудова, где есть дети."[98] This negative view of children finds its clearest expression in the often black humour found in the way Kharms presents wretched child-characters in his literature for adults.

In a delightfully playful unpublished story called "Vospitanie" a sailor buys a nanny to take care of his fifty-four children and instructs her in the ways of disciplining his progeny:

> Вот тебе, нянька, мои дети. Нянчи их и угождай им во всем, но только смотри, чтобы они друг друга не перекусали. Если же они очень шалить будут, ты их полей скипидаром или уксусной эссенции. Они тогда замолкнут."[99]

This brutal and absurd disciplinary treatment echoes the above-

[97] Ibid, sheet 43.

[98] Polet v nebesa, p. 450.

[99] Druskin Fund, #264.

mentioned idea of poisoning children. The story ends in the same brutal way it begins: "Выросло у матроса 54 хулигана. Один из них, уже не помню который, прирезал няньку."[100]

In the few other cases when children are mentioned in Kharms' literature for adults, they are often being hurt in some fashion or appear as the object of hatred. In "Sonet" the "adult" characters argue about which number comes first 7 or 8. Then they are distracted by a gruesome incident which they view as entertainment: "Мы спорили бы очень долго, но, по счастью, тут со скамейки свалился какой-то ребенок и сломал себе обе челюсти. Это отвлекло нас от нашего спора."[101]

Children are also verbally mutilated in the long prose work "Starukha," which echoes the gothic horror tradition of the 19th century.[102] First, in the beginning we see the narrator thinking up a possible punishment for noisy children:

> С улицы слышен противный крик мальчишек. Я лежу и выдумываю им казни. Больше всего мне нравится напустить на них столбняк, чтобы они вдруг перестали двигаться. Родители растаскивают их по домам. Они лежат в своих кроватках и не могут даже есть, потому что у них не открываются рты. Их питают искусственно. Через неделю слолбняк проходит, но

[100] Ibid.

[101] Polet v nebesa, p. 357.

[102] e.g. Gogol's "Vii" or A. Tolstoi's "Vampire Stories."

> дети так слабы, что еще целый месяц должны пролежать в постелях. Потом они начинают постепенно выздоравливать, но я напускаю на них второй столбняк, и они все околевают.[103]

Apart from the macabre content, note the incompatibility of the typically child-related diminutive suffix "к" in the word "кроватках" and the term "околевают," which is normally used to describe the death of animals.

The desire to get rid of annoying children is echoed again in this tale as the narrator-protagonist is bothered by two boys in a train. Another time, over vodka with his friend Sakerdon Mikhailovich, the narrator-protagonist, who is seen by some scholars as a rather close reflection of Kharms himself,[104] makes the following comment: "Терпеть не могу покойников и детей."[105] And Sakerdon Mikhailovich remarks in a similar vein: "дети, пожалуй, хуже, они чаще мешают нам."[106]

The most striking and the most nightmarish reference to children appears in a work called "Ia podnial pyl'," which Kharms wrote in February of 1939, four months earlier than "Starukha." A man is being pursued in what he perceives as a chase through a living hell toward the bathhouse:

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[103] Ibid, p. 399.

[104] See, for example, Stone-Nachimovsky.

[105] Polet v nebesa, p. 414.

[106] Ibid.

> I kicked up dust. Children were running after me and tearing their clothing... Torn children rushed after me; and, falling behind, broke their fragile legs in their terrible haste... Filthy, malnourished children looking like poisonous mushrooms got tangled under my feet. I couldn't run... I jumped, ripped the heads off a few mushrooms...[107]

These scattered, poignant presentations of children in Kharms' literature for adults certainly are far removed from the image of playful children which we see in the above-mentioned examples of Kharms' children's literature. Again, I must stress the importance of the fact that Kharms was writing his children's literature for a demanding audience, while in his secretly written works for adults he was free to "satirize and parody the monstrosities and absurdies of a special set of circumstances, of his own age and country"[108] and even normally innocent children were not saved from the Kharmsian nightmare. Furthermore, Kharms was free to express what may or may not have been his own personal attitude toward children. However, we certainly do not have any conclusive evidence for such an argument. In any case, with respect to Kharms' literature for adults, we can hypothesize that these filthy, animal-like children are not only the products of a world gone mad, but also the progeny of adults who, left without the necessary direction and order imposed from

[107] Available only in English translation by Stone-Nachimovsky, p. 99.

[108] Gibian, p. 34.

above, have become helpless, unguided children themselves. These adults are characterized by some of the most negative features associated with children and childhood—traits reminiscent of W. Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. I would like to turn now to these child-like adults and discuss the special place they occupy in Kharms' absurd and often frightening world.

Random, poorly motivated or unprovoked violence, which is often typical of real-life children, is the first main feature characterizing the behaviour of Kharms' child-like adults. The pages of Kharms' works are filled with punches, kicks and slaps which often appear humorous because of their "Punch and Judy" style. However, there is more to this violence than puppet show aggression; Kharms' absurd comic play almost always takes on darker implications as the gratuitous punches result in death or horrible injury. The most important factor in Kharms' presentation of his fighting adults is that almost in every case neither the characters themselves nor the narrator show any shock or concern about the implications of their actions. Kharms' child-like adult characters, like their younger real-life models, are without developed morals and are unable to fully grasp the consequences of violence.

Kharms presents several pairs of child-like adult fighters. In "Griaznaia lichnost'" a man called Fed'ka kills a man by the name of Sen'ka[109] in a most absurd way: "...Федька догнал Сеньку и

[109]The diminutive suffix "k", typical of children's nicknames, suggests child-like

звинул его сахарницей по голове."[110] The ridiculous murder method makes the act seem all the more playful and joke-like, obfuscating the moral and emotional implications of killing a human being. To make the situation even more absurd, Fed'ka immediately is narrated out of the scene of the crime as he packs his suitcase and goes off to Vladivostok, where he becomes a tailor of ladies' underwear. The accumulation of absurd detail turns the adult business of murder into a childish game where nothing is real. It ought to be noted that no reason is given for the violence in this story: it seems to exist for its own sake—as a gratuitous immature act.

Similarly groundless is the fighting in "Mashkin ubil Koshkina." Here two characters—whose names contain the child-related suffix "к" just like Fed'ka and Sen'ka—take turns hitting each other, and the simple ending cuts the story off abruptly in a typically absurd and illogical vein.: "*Товарищ Кошкин растянулся на полу и умер. Машкин убил Кошкина*."[111] The officially bureaucratic word "*товарищ*" creates an additional absurd effect: it is incompatible with the characters' "unofficial" behaviour, which contradicts the harmonious utopian picture of Soviet society suggested by such a term. Furthermore, "*товарищ*" followed by a last name is an adult title and is in

characteristics.

[110] Polet v nebesa, p. 331.

[111] Ibid, p. 383.

stark contrast with the child-like aspects of the two characters.

In "Pakin i Rakukin" the fight story repeats itself: Pakin kills Rakukin after the two anger each other with childish name-calling. In this story the fight goes on beyond the grave: an element of the fantastic is introduced as Rakukin's spirit jumps out of his dead body and sets off in pursuit of his murderer.

There are two other examples of this story type which we may mention. In "Chto teper' prodaiut v magazinakh" we see Kartygin get upset because his friend Tikakeev, who has gone shopping, doesn't arrive home to meet him on time. The ensuing squabble results in Tikakeev taking out a newly purchased cucumber and using it to kill Kartygin. The absurd last line sums up the absurdity of the whole story: "**Вот какие большие огурцы продают теперь в магазинах!**"[112] The fight in "Istoriia derushchikhsia" is formally very similar to that between Mashkin and Koshkin (cf. above), but this time the two adversaries have dignified and very adult names: Aleksei Alekseevich and Andrei Karlovich. Their fight does not result in a death—although one of them ends up with a torn nostril—but the open ending leaves them still attacking each other. The full names and patronymics of these two characters, which is an attribute of the serious adult world, act as an absurd contrast to their childish behaviour just like the above-mentioned case with "**товарищ**" in "Mashkin ubil

[112] Ibid, p. 382.

Koshkina.".

Aside from these examples, in Kharms' other stories characters are constantly being killed and mutilated; however, groundless or arbitrary childish conflict is not always the cause. Sometimes death occurs out of the blue: without confrontation—often as a result of ridiculous repetitive accidents. Nonetheless, as in the case of the "fighter" stories, the narration of the following tales is always as if from a child's matter of fact point of view. Truly horrible events are never narrated in the dramatic way that would be expected in a more conventional account of similar happenings.

Repetitive dying, for example, is the subject of an entire story. While the first death can be taken as normal, though absurd, what follows is humorous repetition which turns death into an endless game.

Случаи

Однажды Орлов объелся толченым горохом и умер. А Крылов, узнав об этом, тоже умер. А Спиридонов умер сам собой. А жена Спиридонова упала с буфета и тоже умерла. А дети Спиридонова утонули в пруду. А бабушка Спиридонова спилась и пошла по дорогам. А Михайлов перестал причесываться и заболел паршой. А Круглов нарисовал даму с кнутом в руках и сошел с ума. А Перекрестов получил телеграфом четыреста рублей и так заважничал, что его вытолкали со службы.

Хорошие люди и не умеют поставить себя на

твердую ногу.[113]

The final narratorial comment is very typical: it has no logical link with the narrative that precedes it. A similar ending is found in the above-mentioned "Chto teper' prodaiut v magazinakh" where the narrator's final statement "**Вот какие большие огурцы продают теперь в магазинах!**" is manifestly inappropriate after the description of a murder.

Death as a game also appears in a story published for the first time in 1989. Death is stripped of its finality and turned into an amusing activity in the lives of a father and his daughter. The story begins like a fairy tale as the daughter Natasha sits watching a candy on the table in front of her turn into two candies.[114] When the trick stops working, Natasha cries and then begins to sing. Suddenly she dies. Her father buries her, but then she crawls through the ground and returns home. Shocked at seeing her again, her father dies in his turn. Natasha buries him only to get home and see him playing billiards. In this fantastic world, where death has no serious implications, there is another curious feature: we learn that after finding her father alive and well at home, Natasha goes into her room to grow. Here a passive

[113] Ibid, p. 354.

[114] One may be tempted to recall in this connection the famous "**скатерть самобранка**" or the "**горшечек каши**," of Russian fairy tales: two magic devices that multiply or reproduce food.

metamorphosis is transformed into a conscious activity.[115] Four years later she comes out of her room and gleefully recalls with her father the time when they both took each other for dead. Their own laughter at their unreal deaths prompts another bizarre death, which is mentioned in passing—as if it were an insignificant detail: "*А соседи, как услышат смех, так сразу одеваются и в кинематограф уходят. А один раз ушли так, и больше уже не вернулись. Кажется под автомобиль попали.*"[116] Ironically the fake deaths of the father and daughter are described at length, while the real death of the neighbours is mentioned as an afterthought. This is of course in keeping with the upside down twists of Kharms' universe.

Death as a game, a concept which suggests a child's point of view, has to do with an immature mind's denial of danger and mortality.[117] A similarly infantile refusal or inability to avoid danger is found in a number of Kharms' stories where child-like

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[115]The pattern found in the sentence "*Она пошла к себе в комнату расти*" characterizes many other texts in Kharms's œuvre. A syntactically suitable but semantically inappropriate element is introduced into a set, sequence or list where it creates an absurd effect. For example, in "Anekdoty iz zhizni Pushkina" Pushkin points not with his fingers but with his nails: "*«У него растет [борода], а у меня не растет»,—частенько приговаривал Пушкин, показывая ногтями на Захарьина. И всегда был прав.*"

[116]Druskin Fund, #271.

[117]In the real world it is usually held to constitute a self-protective mechanism: a kind of head-in-the-sand behaviour; however, Kharms's absurd universe is unlikely to yield such an interpretation.

adults hurt themselves repetitively, unable to learn how to avoid such occurrences. The most humourous example of such a case is the story about the carpenter Kushakov who sets off to get glue. This story begins like a standard fairy tale—"Жил-был столяр"; however, by means of a typical Kharmsian shift, the reader's initial expectations are thwarted by an absurd narrative pattern, which is found in many other instances: the hero is caught up in a never-ending stream of obstacles, which prevent him from achieving his goal.[118] Kushakov never gets anywhere as he keeps falling down: he breaks successively his forehead, nose, cheek and chin and has to keep returning to the pharmacy to get bandages.[119] When he finally goes home, he is so bandaged up that his family does not recognize him and throws him out of the house.

Thus, the seriousness of death, violence and accidents does not come into question in Kharms' adult universe. Whereas most literature—from the Middle Ages through Dante to Goethe—seems to take death very seriously, Kharms appears to dismiss it as just another daily acitivity, denying its finality and its "grim reaper" image. Neither the characters nor the narrator manifest any "normal" reaction to the narrated events. Everything is no more serious than a child's game of let's pretend. The most extreme

[118]This is related to another narrative pattern discussed above: a story that ends without ever getting off the ground.

[119]The breaking of a cheek is another example of the pattern mentioned in note 115.

example of an immature reaction to serious events is found in a story translated as *Vindication*. Here a criminal awaiting his trial rids his behaviour of any considerations of guilt or responsibility. His reasoning suggests the conscience of a child whose main goal is to avoid punishment: having commited heinous crimes, but devoid of morals, he does not see that he has done anything wrong.

> I can say without boasting that when Volodya hit me in the ear and spat in my eyes, I let him have it in a way he will never forget. After that I beat him with the little gas stove; in the evening I beat him with the flatiron. So that he did not die right away. And where is there any proof that in the course of the day I cut his leg off? He was still alive then... And I did not rape Elizaveta Antovna. First of all, she was not a virgin any more. Secondly, I was dealing with a corpse. So it is not for her to be accusing me. So what if she was just about to give birth to a baby! I pulled the child out of her...[120]

I would like to contrast this striking example of naive sophistry in reaction to death and violence with the only "normal" or "mature" reaction to terrible events in all of Kharms' stories: "Sud'ba zheny professora." A professor dies in a Moscow hospital a few days after having eaten something bad. His ashes are mailed in a package back to his loving wife. She reads the words "Вот все, что осталось от Вашего супруга" and is apparently affected by the news:

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[120]Gibian, p. 61. Text only available in English translation.

> Жена ничего понять не может, трясет баночку, на свет ее смотрит, записку шесть раз прочитала — наконец, сообразила, в чем дело, и страшно расстроилась. Жена профессора очень расстроилась, поплакала часа три и пошла баночку с пеплом, хоронить.[121]

But here again, despite its seeming normality, the mourning is made absurd by the pragmatic specification of its duration: "часа три," and its very temporary quality is stressed by the prefix "по-" in the verb "поплакала" which usually conveys short duration and in this case trivializes the woman's grief. The word "расстроилась," which is clearly too weak to convey real sorrow, further weakens the reaction of the professor's wife. It is as if the narrator does not allow his character to react in a "normal" way to an event whose gravity requires a much more serious response. The grieving woman is restricted even further in her attempt at a "normal" reaction to death when some people from the insane asylum arrive and take the "совершенно нормальная профессорша" away. Thus, the only mature character in Kharms' stories is suppressed and deprived of the chance to behave in a non-childish way.

The immature and even clownish child-like adult also appears in Kharms' stories about famous men. Great artists and authors are presented as ridiculous clowns, acting in a manner that

[121] In Raduga 7, 88, p. 33.

sharply contrasts with their serious reputation.

The best known example of this grotesque metamorphosis is the story "Pushkin i Gogol'," where two of Russia's greatest authors keep stumbling over each other on stage, falling down and cursing:

> *Гоголь падает из-за кулис на сцену и смирно лежит.*
>
> Пушкин (*выходит, спотыкается об Гоголя и падает*): Вот черт! Никак об Гоголя!
>
> Гоголь (*поднимаясь*): Мерзопакость какая! Отдохнуть не дадут (*Идет, спотыкается об Пушкина и падает.*) Никак об Пушкина спотыкнулся!
>
> Пушкин (*поднимаясь*): Ни минуты покоя! (*Идет, спотыкается об Гоголя и падает.*) Вот черт! Никак опять об Гоголя![122]

Once again we have a story that never gets started and consists of the same repeated sequence. Kharms presents what may be seen as an allegorical battle over which author is the superior literary figure, but rather than letting one be the conclusive victor, Kharms humorously equates these giants of Russian literature as two equally drunken goons.[123]

Basic bodily functions are associated with the famous Russian

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[122] Polet v nebesa, p. 360.

[123] This episode between Pushkin and Gogol certainly can be interpreted as a manifestation of Kharms' affinities with the literary past. The intertextuality that one observes in this and other works definitely merits further study.

author Lev Tolstoy in a dream seen by the wife of the deceased professor in the above-mentioned story "Sud'ba zheny professora." Tolstoy resembles a proud two-year-old who has produced something quite impressive:

> Идет она и спит. И видит сон, будто идет к ней навстречу Лев Толстой и в руках ночной горшок держит. Она его спрашивает: ‹‹Что же это такое?›› А он показывает ей пальцем на горшок и говорит:
>
> —Вот,—говорит, — тут я кое-что наделал, и теперь несу всему свету показывать. Пусть, — говорит, — все смотрят.[124]

In this case the act of creation is brought down to the physiological level of a child's capabilities: instead of the expected literary work, the great author has produced the least intellectual thing possible. However, the allusion to Tolstoy's creative activities makes this story different from the preceding one where Pushkin and Gogol are detached from their role as creators.

General ignorance and naïveté turn a number of Kharms' adult characters into children who are unable to perform the most basic everyday tasks. Kindergarten-level counting is the subject of a story called "Sonet." A man suddenly forgets which comes first: seven or eight. He goes to his neighbours for help, but they cannot figure it out either, and they all approach a cashier in a

[124] Raduga 7, 88, p. 33-4.

store who confuses them even more with the absurd statement: "По-моему, семь идет после восьми в том случае, когда восемь идет после семи."[125] Confused even further these helpless adults argue and then eventually just go home. In this case not one but all the adult characters lack a basic skill normally possessed by grade one students. This is pushed to the limit of absurdity when the cashier, who should be able to count better than anyone else, having to work with numbers constantly, is unable to offer any assistance to the helpless counters. Not only does she fail to help them, but she confuses them even more with a circular argument, which destroys the concept of basic sequential progression.[126]

Thus, the world created in Kharms' stories for adults is a dangerous, violent and often nightmarish domain. This is frequently the result of immature behaviour on the part of its adult inhabitants who are very similar to children in their

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[125] Polet v nebesa, p. 357.

[126] This story about number confusion is strikingly similar to a more recent text by a modern children's writer Oleg Grigoriev. Just like Kharms, he is from Leningrad and, until the Gorbachev era, his works suffered a fate similar to that of his absurdist predecessor. Grigoriev's story is entitled "Lestnitsa": "Поднимаясь по лестнице домой, Петров насчитал восемь ступенек; спускаясь по лестнице вниз, насчитал только семь." As the narrative progresses, the seven-eight discrepancy in the staircase [note that in Kharms's story the numbers are also seven and eight], is discovered by different characters: a building custodian, a policeman and even the civil engineer responsible for the construction of the building. Just like Kharms's perplexed characters, Grigoriev's characters come up with an absurd solution: the staircase is torn down, and the reader learns the following: "Теперь, когда Петров идет домой, он подпрыгивает на восемь ступенек вверх, а когда выходит из дома, прыгает на семь ступенек вниз." [Oleg Grigoriev, "Lestnitsa," Ogonek, Aug. 1990, p. 30.]

mentality but, unlike children, they are not controlled by a higher authority and remain free to wreak havoc. In his children's literature, as we have seen, Kharms creates a largely pleasant playful universe where real children—as opposed to childish adults—are the protagonists. While the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s saw the cheerful, game-playing children of his children's literature, Kharms kept his literature for adults, along with his drawings, a total secret, even from his closest friends. As one friend tells in her memoirs:

> Хармс сам очень любил рисовать, но мне свои рисунки никогда не показывал, а также все, что он писал для взрослых. Он запретил это всем своим друзьям, а с меня взял клятву, что я не буду пытаться достать его рукописи.[127]

[127] A. Poret. "Vospominaniia o Daniile Kharmse," in Panorama Iskusstv 3, (Moscow: Sov. khudozhnik, 1980), p. 357.

Chapter 5: The Darker Side of the Child's World

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Daniil Kharms' children's literature seems to portray a playful, pleasant, positive world as opposed to his literature for adults: "*Активная творческая жизнь ребенка—нового героя Хармса—стала для него своего рода антитезой ужасу прозябания, изображенному в его «взрослых» вещах.*"[128] Indeed it is true that the child in Kharms' children's works plays games and functions in an amusing world of child protagonists, active plots, optimism, at times didactic messages, child-oriented language, happy endings, adventure and fantasy,[129] which are some of the basic elements which distinguish children's literature from literature for adults.

In "Vo-pervykx i vo-vtorykh," as we have already discussed, we see two boys travelling around by different modes of transportation, whistling or singing all the way and exclaiming such optimistic lines as: "*Мы веселые ребята.*"[130] In the well-known poem "Ivan Ivanich Samovar," we have an anthropomorphized samovar who gleefully gives tea to those who wake up in time but punishes those who come late; this is very much in line with the widespread didactic tradition of children's

[128] Petrovskii, p. 259.

[129] For the full list of these distinguishing elements of children's literature see Myles McDowell, "Written for Children, Written for Adults ".

[130] Polet v nebesa, p. 256.

literature. Contrary to Kharms' children's literature, his literature for adults presents pitiful and often child-like adults who live a nightmare of unmotivated or poorly motivated violence, ignorance, naïveté, confusion and suffering.

However, I intend to demonstrate that, contrary to what might be expected, the division of Kharms' literatures into the positive and the happy world of the child vs. the negative and dismal domain of the child-like adult is not quite so clear-cut. Such an antipodal division normally does separate children's literature from many examples of fiction for adults; however, Kharms was not a normal writer. A knowledge of Kharms' literature for adults and of his position in the Soviet literary institution suggest that this author was incapable of preventing aspects of his adult nightmare from creeping into his children's literature. Thus, in the final account we can see that his two literatures share not only similar ludic features on the structural/linguistic level (cf. Chapter 3), but also a negativeness, which in his children's literature faintly echoes his adult world. In one notable case we even see typical Kharmsian unmotivated violence which is clearly related to the numerous incidents of child-like adult violence we have discussed in the previous chapter.

It is easy to make the mistake of believing that Kharms' children's literature is all happy and positive: it is playful and full of adventure, especially when it is contrasted with the clearly more gloomy works for adults. In George Gibian's words:

> Unlike the stories for grownups, [Kharms'] children's tales are usually comforting, at least in the end. They are not nightmares but dreams of wish fulfillment. Children who very much want an airplane ride get one; they go to Brazil, or at least they think they do; then they arrive home again, and are even given a ride in a car as a bonus.[131]

However, in his description of this story Gibian has failed to note a very important element, which illustrates my point about the lack of a clear-cut division between Kharms' two literatures. In "Kak Kol'ka Pankin letel v Braziliiu i Pet'ka Ershov nichemu ne veril" there is a striking bit of evidence which shows that the unpleasantness of Kharms' adult world has made its way into the domain of the child. As demonstrated by the numerous above-mentioned examples, in many of Kharms' stories for adults characters appear unable to accomplish anything either because of their own lack of power or because the stories themselves never get off the ground. "Kak Kol'ka Pankin letel v Braziliiu i Pet'ka Ershov nichemu ne veril" is at first glance about the flight of fantasy, thematized by the airplane ride. However, Pet'ka refuses to share in Kol'ka's fantastic adventures, constantly doubting the validity of his friend's imagination: he refuses to believe that they have landed in Brazil and interprets every one of Kol'ka's fantastic visions in very mundane terms, e.g., Kol'ka's South American bison is turned into an ordinary Russian cow. Thus, Kol'ka's attempt to escape from the everyday world is undermined, and in such a

[131] Gibian, p. 29.

way that we end up believing the doubter and not the imaginer. In traditional children's literature a fantastic voyage is not normally cancelled by the denial of the powers of imagination. More typically, as in the tales of Aladin and other fairy tales, fantasy has its own delightful rules and is usually not affected by the whims of a sceptical character.

The mundane drives the last nail into the coffin of fantasy when in the end of the story a driver picks up the two boys after their airplane ride and drives them home to reality. At first Kol'ka tries to convince his sceptical friend that the approaching car is a monster, but Pet'ka does not believe this either:

> —А как же вы сюда попали? —удивился шофер.
> —Да вот Колька,—ревел Петька,—обещал в Бразилию свезти, а сам сюда привез.
> —В Брусилово... Брусилово... Постойте, Брусилово это дальше, это где—то в Черниговской области,—сказал шофер.[132]

The driver is even more anti-fantastic than Pet'ka because he does not even bother to doubt the Brazil story: he simply does not hear it and adapts the fantastic word "Brazil" to the very reality that Kol'ka is trying to flee.[133]

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[132] Chto eto bylo? n.p.

[133] It is interesting and tragic that in reply to this mix-up Kol'ka tries to turn the word mix-up back toward his wonderful fantasy. He says: "Чилиговская область... Чилийская республика... Чили... Это южнее, это там, где Аргентина. Чили находится на берегу Тихого

The nightmare of Kharms' adult universe intrudes in a much more overt way into the child's world in the story "Skazka." A little boy, Vania, wants to write a typical fairy tale, but a little girl, Lenochka, says that all the stories Vania proposes have already been written and then proceeds to tell her versions of them. On the formal level this is an excellent example of a game involving metafictional self-referentiality: the story ends with Vania buying a copy of the magazine which contains the story about him that we have just read. Furthermore, "Skazka" has another ludic feature that we have discussed in Chapter 3: the distortion of the conventional fairy-tale form. However, beneath the humorous impact of this playfulness lie frightful images of violence which are far from the realm of the truly childish above-mentioned story of the samovar who punishes those who come late.

Right from the first story told by Lenochka to the would-be author Vania we are shocked by a horrifying violence that would never be found in conventional children's literature. When the little boy expresses the desire to write a story about a king and a queen, the little girl tells him that such a story has already been

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океана..." But the fantasy has already been killed and the character who wants to escape from the sordid everyday is outnumbered by two anti-fantacizers who take him back to Leningrad. The negative aspect of this city when compared with Brazil is emphasized by the word "торгащие" and its negative connotation in the final sentence of the story: "—А вон и Ленинград виднеется,—сказал шофер, указывая рукой на торгащие в небо трубы и крыши."

written and proves her point with the following macabre narrative:

> —...Король пил чай с яблоками и вдруг подавился, а королева стала бить его по спине, чтобы кусок яблока выскочил из горла обратно. А король подумал, что королева дерется, и ударил ее стаканом по голове. Тут королева рассердилась и ударила короля тарелкой. А король ударил королеву миской. А королева ударила короля стулом. А король вскочил и ударил королеву столом. А королева повалила на короля буфет. Но король вылез из под буфета и пустил в королеву короной. Тогда королева схватила короля за волосы и выбросила его в окошко. Но король влез обратно в комнату через другое окно, схватил королеву и запихал ее в печку. Но королева вылезла через трубу на крышу, потом спустилась по громоотводу в сад и через окно вернулась обратно в комнату. А король в это время растапливал печку, чтобы сжечь королеву. Королева подкралась сзади и толкнула короля. Король полетел в печку и там сгорел. Вот и вся сказка,—сказала Леночка.[134]

This story certainly reminds us of the numerous texts about puppet-like fighting men in Kharms' world of child-like adults. However, the horror of "Skazka" can be viewed as being even greater since its form is taken from a traditional children's genre. Using the traditional fairy tale beginning "Жил-был король..." which is a clearly conventional welcome sign into the world of enchantment,[135] Lenochka suddenly tells horrible things as if

[134] Ibid, p. 275-6.

[135] E. Rabkin, The Fantastic in Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

they were not in contrast with the conventional world of the children's fairy tale. Vania's reaction to the story shows that he does not see its nightmarish quality as anything out of the ordinary. He merely says: "Очень глупая сказка.. Я хотел написать совсем другую."[136] "Глупая" is hardly appropriate as a qualifier for such a deviation from our genre expectations. The specific act of stuffing someone into the oven is reminiscient of scenes from "Hansel and Gretel" or the Russian Baba-Iaga. But unlike these stories, in which punishment of the evil witch is motivated, here the whole shocking episode is based on a simple misunderstanding.

Pain and mutilation, normally kept at a distance in conventional children's literature, are not only present in a story called "Molochnyi zub," but they appear as an absurd, unneccessary phenomenon, very much like their counterparts in Kharms' literature for adults. A littie girl is very frightened because she has to have a tooth pulled. She is in the editorial offices of a publishing house—all bent over in fear. When she explains her problem to a female editor, the latter tells her that getting a tooth pulled is no more painful than getting pricked with a pin. Thus far we have a very typical didactic children's plot, but at this point the absurd takes over. Rather than using this

1976), p. 34.

[136] Polet v nebesa, p. 276.

comparison just figuratively, as we would expect, the editor demonstrates it by pricking the little girl with a pin and then explaining: "**рвать молочный зуб не больнее этого укола**."[137] Thus, we observe the rather absurd and sadistic act of causing pain to a child to show that future pain would be bearable. This "literalization" of a figurative comparison—pain=pin prick—does introduce a ludic element to be sure, but it also strips the child's world of some of its innocence. Danger and pain become not abstract notions but real experience, and since pain in this case is unneccessary and futile, it is all the more frightening to a young mind. The narrator, like the narrator of Kharms' works for adults, does not find anything strange about this whole incident and merely makes the closing comment: "**Можно только отметить находчивость этой редакторши**."[138]

Thus, we see that Kharms' generally positively-oriented children's literature is often penetrated with some of the same negative elements that we find in his literature for adults, although the two domains clearly differ in degree of negativeness. Let us note in conclusion that in at least two of Kharms' stories his world of the child and that of the adult come together in the characters of old women.

In "Vyvalivaiushchiesia starukhi" the old women seem to have regressed to a child-like senile state, engaging in irrational acts

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[137] Druskin Fund #281.

[138] Ibid.

dangerous to themselves. They fall out of a window one after another—like children who lack the physical coordination to look out without plummeting to the ground:

> Одна старуха от чрезмерного любопытства вывалилась из окна, упала и разбилась. Из окна высунулась другая старуха и стала смотреть вниз на разбившуюся, но от чрезмерного любопытства тоже вывалилась из окна, упала и разбилась.[139]

The narration in this story is as matter-of-fact as it is in so many other descriptions of death and mutilation in Kharms' work: "...the most crucial element in the balance between grotesque and ordinary is the narrator, whose cheerful acceptance of anything that happens makes the grotesque completely banal."[140] Quite in keeping with this attitude, the narrator closes the story in the following callous way: "Когда вывалилась шестая старуха, мне надоело смотреть на них, и я пошел на Мальцевский рынок, где, говорят, одному слепому подарили вязаную шаль."[141] And so the old women in this story harm themselves because of their senility without disturbing the aloof narrator in

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[139] Polet v nebesa, p. 356.

[140] Stone-Nachimovsky, p. 68.

[141] Polet v nebesa, p. 356. [Consider the similarity between this closing statement and the equally irrelevant last sentence of Gogol's Notes of a Madman. Gogol's narrator, whose insanity is a possible precursor to Kharms's insane world, ends his long plaintive and satirically poetic cry for help with the unexpected: "Я знаете ли, что у алжирского дея под самым носом шишка?"

any way whatsoever.

This story is among Kharms' works for adults, but its subject—the child-like helplessness of the old—also appears in one of his children's stories entitled "O tom, kak starushka chernila pokupala." Its heroine is a confused, slightly deaf old lady whose husband has died and whose son has moved away. As the plot demonstrates, she cannot cope in the world alone and seems to have a very limited understanding of reality. For example, she cannot understand "*куда же это снег делся*" in the middle of summer.[142] One day she wants to buy some ink and asks various people on the street—the street cleaner, the fish salesman, the butcher and others—if they can sell it to her or tell her where to buy it. They all give her the same reply: "*Ты что, с луны свалилась!*"[143] or ignore her altogether. Her perception of an elevator as "*комнатка-шкафик*"[144] resembles a child's defamiliarized view of this machine seen for the first time. The old woman finally ends up at the editorial offices of a children's publishing house where the writer of the story offers to give her ink if she agrees to tell him about the adventures that she has had during her ink quest.

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[142] Letiat po nebu shariki, p. 114.

[143] Ibid. p. 115.

[144] Ibid, p. 119.

Conclusion

Kharms' literature is full of mainly three contrasting trends: his relatively bright children's literature versus his very macabre literature for adults; endless random and often bloody violence versus its "Punch and Judy" features which make it difficult to be taken seriously; and finally the formal games and funny twists of plot and language versus the more tragic or downright frightful aspects of Kharms' absurd universe. It becomes clear that the young, the in-between and the old are all caught up in a vortex of horror and laughter which confuses the reader. Because of genre requirements and ideological pressure from the Soviet literary institution, Kharms' children's works had to be more pleasant and less ambiguous than his literature for adults. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that my analysis of his children's works against the background of his secretly written works for adults has demonstrated that Kharms' two literatures are definitely the product of the same pen. It is now hopefully clear that Kharms, the writer for adults, and Kharms, the children's author, influenced each other, producing works that fit neither the conventional expectations of adult readers nor those of children. This if of course very fitting for a century that has been characterized by the destruction of conventions and for a writer who lived and worked in a society full of terror and the unexpected.

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